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Statement submitted by Human Rights Advocates Inc., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Increasing Social Protections for Women through Participation and Representation

I. Introduction and the Conflicts of Lack of Women Participation and Representation

Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance." These words were uttered by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary component in achieving the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). (General Assembly Res. 70/1, 59, U.N. Doc. A/RES/70/1 (Sep. 25, 2015).) For women and girls everywhere to live free from violence and discrimination, they must be afforded equal rights and opportunities. This idea is encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goal's s fifth goal: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." (Id.).

There are nine targets within the fifth goal aimed at gender equality, two being the most pertinent in achieving active participation and representation of women. First, to achieve parity, the nations should "[e]nsure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life." (UN Women, Sustainable Development Goals five: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality). Secondly, the nations should "[a]dopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels" (Id.).

"Every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define her or his life. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. This right argues that since women know their situation best, they should participate equally with men to have their perspective effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making, from the private to the public spheres of their lives, from the local to the global." (Rosa Miranda, Impact of women's participation and leadership on outcomes, http://www.un.org/womenwatch /daw/egm/eql-men/docs/EP.7_rev.pdf.) The following is a comparative study of the global region's participation and representation of women in positions of power and decision-making.

II. Regional Comparisons of Women in Politics

a. Europe

Europe is one of the top five countries with the largest share of women ministers. (UN Women, Press Release: New IPU and UN Women map shows women's representation in politics stagnating). The total percentage of women's participation is 22.5 per cent, an increase from 21.6 per cent in 2015. Surprisingly, Nordic countries that normally have the highest women's representation, suffered the largest decrease globally in 2017, a 6.2 per cent from 2015. However, women still account for almost half of the executives in this region. Bulgaria has seen a tremendous increase, previously ranking 45th globally (2010), it now ranks first. Representation has risen from 17.6 per cent (2010) to 52.9 per cent.

Although the Nordic countries have suffered a setback, they promote women's leadership by requiring publicly listed companies to have at least 40 per cent of their board positions reserved for women. (Johanna Bjork, What Scandinavia Can Teach Us About Gender Equality, letsdomore.com.) In the 70's, Denmark, Sweden and Norway introduced voluntary gender quotas. (The Situation in the European Union, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-pay-gap/situationeurope/index_en.htm). These quotas have worked so well that at least one country has done away with the program because it was no longer necessary. (Pande, Rohini, and Deanna Ford, Gender Quotas and Female Leadership, pg. 8 (2011) http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1322671773271/Pande-Gender-Quotas-April-2011.pdf).)

b. Americas

The Americas is one of the top five countries with the largest share of women ministers. (UN Women, supra). They have seen an increase of 2.6 per cent from 2015, raising the percentage from 22.4 to 25. Although the increase seems minute, it has set a new high in the region. However, they also saw a decrease in women holding Heads of State and Heads of Government positions when the presidents of Brazil and Argentina left office.

Fluctuation varies from country to country, Canada and Nicaragua surpassed gender parity in ministerial positions. Additionally, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay approached or exceeded 30 per cent. However, Brazil continued its downward trend, dropping from a 25.6 per cent (2014), to 15.4 per cent (2015) to finally, four per cent (2017). (Id.).

A significant factor in women's participation and representation is gender stereotypes. In Latin America, women are often steered away from careers in architecture, law and engineering and pushed towards less developed skills, such as teaching and nursing. (Inter-American Development Bank, Latin American and Caribbean Women: Better Educated, Lower Paid [Oct. 15, 2012]).

c. Asia and Oceania

In Asia, women held 11 per cent of ministerial posts, a 0.4 per cent increase from 2015. Indonesia had the highest participation of women in government at 25.7 per cent, while Vietnam and Nepal's fell below five, a very large decline. (UN Women, Press Release: New IPU and UN Women map shows women's representation in politics stagnating.) Southern and East Asia's low women's participation is attributed to the concentration of women in traditional low-paid service jobs. (Hodgson, An., In Focus: Income Inequality between Men and Women to Worsen in Asia Pacific, Euromonitor International (2014), http://blog.euromonitor.com/2014/07/in-focusincome-inequality-between-men-and-women-to-worsen-in-asia-pacific.html.) It is suggested that some of the disparity is rooted in culture and tradition, and a product of legal differences between men and women, particularly those in South Asia. However, in Southeast Asia, the participation gaps have narrowed due to a small decline in male participation allowing women to take on more of the once male-occupied positions. (International Labour Office, Women at Work, Trends of 2016, pg. 6 (2016), http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_457317.pdf.)

Among the Arab States, 9.7 per cent of senior executive posts are held by women, an increase of 0.2 per cent from 2015. Tunisia's women's representation was at 23.1 per cent, an increase from 10.5 per cent in 2015 after two women joined the

government. United Arab Emirates' representation was 26.7 per cent. In this region, only these two countries hold percentages over 20. (UN Women, Press Release: New IPU and UN Women map shows women's representation in politics stagnating.)

In Oceania, women's representation increased in 2012. However, since then the Pacific region has seen stagnation in its numbers, remaining at 13 per cent since 2015. However, the Pacific region only includes 14 countries, because of this, any slight change in numbers could have a significant impact on the percentage of positions held by women.

d. Africa

Africa has seen a steady decline of women ministers; this trend has been fixed since 2015. (Id.) In 2017, women held 19.7 per cent of the region's ministerial power. This percentage was last surpassed in 2012. Though steady, it shows an increase in the five years that have passed. The top two countries in this region are Congo and Zambia, "adding four and six women ministers and reaching women's representation rates of 22.9 per cent and 33.3 per cent, respectively." (Id.) In 2018, the prime minister of Ethiopia has appointed women to more than half of the cabinet posts. This has created opportunities for radical reform of the African country. (The Guardian, Women win half of Ethiopia's cabinet roles in reshuffle), https://www.theguardian.com /world/2018/oct/16/women-win-half-of-ethiopias-cabinet-roles-in-reshuffle.)

III. Recommendations

The United Nations' goal of sustainable development cannot be achieved until there is equal participation and representation among women and men. Women's rights are human rights. Without women's participation, accurate representation of social issues will continue to fall short of fair and just. To ensure the increase of social protections of women through participation and representation, the Commission and the States of the world should encourage the implementation of policies supporting women's participation and representation. In that regard, Human Rights Advocates recommends:

1. Commission on the Status of Women urge countries to publicly acknowledge the lack of women participation and representation in positions of power and decision making.

2. State Governments to

a. Encourage the creation of social floor protections for women by establishing gender quotas in positions where decision-making largely affects females;

b. Encourage the creation of programs focused on getting women into decision-making positions. Programs should include high school and elementary programs which help encourage women into these fields and create successful pathways into the workforce beginning with early intervention;

c. Use incentives, for public companies to strive for increase of women participation and representation, including the use of tax breaks or grants for meeting certain gender quotas; and

d. Encourage the implementation of penalties for publicly-listed employers who do not make substantial moves to encourage women participation and representation through procedure changes and antidiscrimination policies.